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ANNAPOLIS MARYLAND NEWS

# Public works head: Uncompetitive market, Trump tariffs raise Annapolis construction costs



By **BROOKS DUBOSE**  
CAPITAL GAZETTE | NOV 27, 2019

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### Truxtun Pool

Lothorian project manager Scott Colimore talks about the construction of the new Truxtun Park Pool. (Paul W. Gillespie)

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An uncompetitive contracting market and the federal government's tariffs on Chinese building materials among other factors have driven up the cost of several city projects, including the redevelopment of Truxtun Park Pool by an estimated 15-25%, the Annapolis public works director said.

The Truxtun Park Pool project will cost nearly \$5 million due to increased construction costs stemming from a lack of competitive bids from contractors as well as steep tariffs President Donald Trump's administration has placed on Chinese steel, aluminum and other materials, said Public Works Director David Jarrell.

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Jarrell spoke to those issues at the Nov. 18 City Council meeting in which the council unanimously approved an additional allocation of \$951,000 for the project. About \$177,000 will go to increased construction costs and another \$200,00 for complying with stormwater management rules the city passed in January.

Another \$360,000 of the allocated money is earmarked as contingency money for unanticipated costs, which Jarrell said is unlikely to be spent. The rest is for a standard 5% charge the general fund takes to administer the project.

“We may never need the contingency money. If we need it, it’s available,” Jarrell said at the Nov. 18 meeting.

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**[Jarrell was appointed as the new city manager last month](#)** despite not meeting City Code requirements. He is expected to be confirmed at the next City Council meeting Dec. 9.

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There are simply not enough contractors and subcontractors to meet the demand of all the development projects in the city, he said, estimating that the cost of those projects has also increased by between 15 and 25%.

Just how much the tariffs specifically within the construction increases have affected costs is somewhat harder to determine, Jarrell said.

The Trump administration has been embroiled in a trade war with China since last year. It imposed a 25% tariff on steel and a 10% tariff on aluminum in March 2018. The administration has exempted some countries from the tariffs, but those on Chinese construction materials remained in place.

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The city has recently received higher than usual bids for construction projects — an estimate for the City Dock flood mitigation project on Compromise Street is expected to go up as well — which Jarrell attributed to the contracting community still not fully rebounding from the economic recession in 2008.

That has led to the number of major construction projects outweighing the number of contractors, he said. In essence, there is too much work and not enough workers.

“I think what happens is that as the economy continues to be good and there continues to be a lot of construction work that for a while you really suffer and you get into the situation we have right now,” Jarrell said. “Eventually if it stays this way — with this pace of construction — they’ll catch up. It just takes a little bit of time.”

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included in the fiscal year 2020 budget to pay for furnishings like lounge chairs and improvements to the parking lot.

The rising costs of the pool redevelopment are becoming increasingly difficult to explain to constituents, Alderman Fred Paone, R-Ward 2, said Nov. 18.

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“It’s nobody in particular’s fault,” Paone said. “My constituents say, ‘What happened to the 3.8 million that the pool was going to cost? It’s now 5 million.’ Hopefully not that much but it’s a little tough to explain to some folks.”

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Jarrell agreed, stating that while costs were going up, his department was doing its best to cut in other areas of the project such as reducing the size of the planned bathhouse and patio area.

With several major infrastructure and resiliency projects, such as the City Dock redevelopment and the rebuilding of Hillman Garage, coming in the next five years, Alderman Rob Savidge, D-Ward 7, said he was concerned that these

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“The budget that we’ve adopted put us right up to our debt ceiling and so it makes it much more difficult to pay for these projects,” Savidge said. “I don’t think we should be budgeting to use our saving for projects. If we can’t afford them we should be waiting to do them.”



Brooks DuBose



Brooks DuBose is a staff writer at The Capital who covers the city of Annapolis and the Naval Academy.

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